



NEW BREED OF BRILLIANT BRITS

# TVR SAGARIS

The Sagaris is the first all-new TVR to be produced under the company's new Russian boss, Nikolai Smolenski. It's also the best built and most complete TVR ever

PHOTOGRAPHY STAN PAPIOR





# AUTOCAR ROAD TEST

## TVR SAGARIS

List price **£49,995**

Top speed **185mph**

0-60mph **3.9sec**

70-0mph **48.0m**

Average test MPG **15.1**

**For** Amazing looks, huge performance, ride/handling

**Against** Easy to grind the nose into the floor, poor steering lock

TVR MAY consider the Sagaris to be its finest creation yet – and with good reason considering a) how sensational it looks, and b) how much better made it is than any previous Blackpool effort. But we can't help thinking they made a terrible spelling mistake with the name – surely they should have called it Thugaris.

Because even by TVR's own heady standards this is not a machine for the faint-hearted. In the flesh it looks like the result of some bizarre scientific experiment involving a giant insect, an MGB GT and a wind tunnel. On the road it is, claims TVR, as fast as any car you'd care to think of, including exotica such as the Porsche Carrera GT and Ferrari Enzo. And yet in the showroom it costs 'just' £49,995.

Question is, are the supposedly radical improvements TVR has made with the Sagaris in terms of build quality, performance, chassis dexterity and styling sufficient to justify a price now within a stone's throw of a new Porsche 911's? That is what we're here to find out.

## DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★★

**Big improvement in quality, looks absolutely amazing**

TVR's new Russian boss, Nikolai Smolenski, has come in for a fair bit of criticism since buying the company from enigmatic Lancastrian Peter Wheeler this time last year, but if the Sagaris is the consequence of this regime change then he certainly doesn't deserve it. Truth is, the Sagaris makes major strides forwards in several key areas technically and is harder still to argue against visually. In some ways it is the car TVR always promised to pro-

duce but never quite managed to deliver under Peter Wheeler – though having said that, much of the styling work was completed under his guidance.

Either way, the result is surely one of the most spectacular sports cars ever to go on sale in the UK. In the flesh it's a surprisingly small machine: parked next to a VW Golf or Ford Focus it looks compact, bordering on the tiny. Yet the drama of its stance and its details still lend it massive road presence, especially the super-low front splitter and the fake cooling fins that run along the tops of each wing. People tend to move over pretty rapidly when this car appears in their rear-view mirror.

And with good reason. Beneath the bonnet, but mounted so far back in the chassis that TVR rightly refers to the Sagaris as being front-mid-engined, lies Blackpool's now venerable 3996cc aluminium straight six. Except in this instance it has been tuned to produce 406bhp between 7000-7500rpm and 349lb ft at 5000rpm. Thank this particular engine's forged aluminium pistons, forged steel conrods, remapped fuel injection system and dry-sump oil system for that.

But it's the chassis, arguably, that makes the biggest leap forward. As usual there are double unequal-length wishbones at each corner and predictably vast ventilated disc brakes front and rear, but the springs are more than two times stiffer than any previous TVR's and mark a radical change in suspension philosophy. The idea is that these stiffer springs allow far less body movement and provide much better high-speed control without any significant loss of traction or ride quality. Considering TVR got some of the best names in the business to help fine-tune the car's dampers, it will be interesting to experience the results.

Apart from introducing harder springs and a rather more thorough approach to durability testing, another aspect Smolenski has altered is the way his cars steer. They are deliberately less aggressive than of old, hence the Sagaris has a rack that has two whole turns between the locks and electro-hydraulic assistance.

## PERFORMANCE/BRAKES

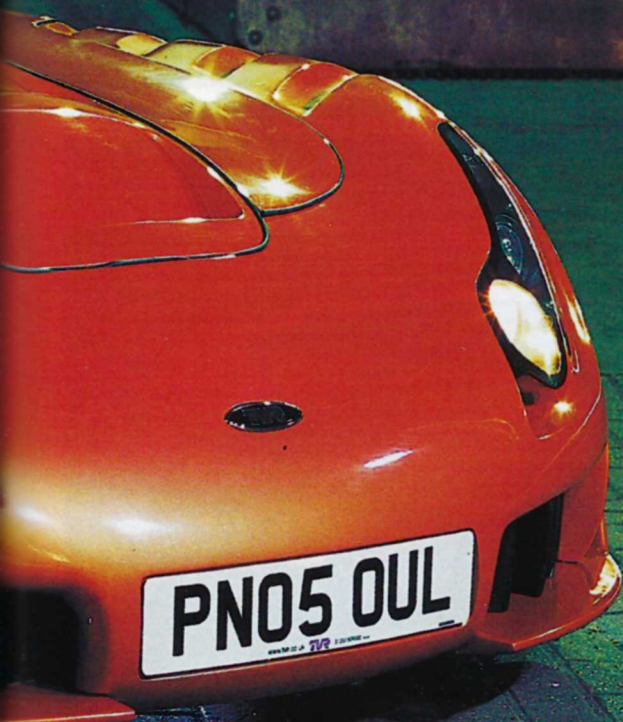
★★★★★

**Goes like a train, stops brilliantly. Pity no anti-lock**

There aren't many things on this earth that can prepare you for what happens when a Sagaris really gets into its stride. To begin with you might even feel a little disappointed when you let the stiff twin-plate clutch out and nail the long-travel accelerator. Because, initially, although it's impossibly rapid by normal standards, there isn't quite the eruption of wheelspin, tyre smoke and acceleration you might expect from a car with 406bhp and just 1159kg to lug around.

But once you realise the Sagaris can do over 60mph in first gear and hit 100mph while still in second, your ♠

**HISTORY** TVR unveiled a prototype Sagaris in December 2003, but it's taken a year and a half and a change of chairman before the car has made it to production. In the intervening period, new boss Nikolai Smolenski has famously introduced durability testing and reliability schemes. He also revised the steering and suspension and changed the build procedures. Fundamentally, however, the car looks the same as the prototype and has the same engine created under ex-boss Peter Wheeler's guidance.







◆ whole perception of the car's performance shifts. And only then do you realise – fully – just how fast it really is. The way it devours gears and explodes up to and beyond three figures needs to be experienced to be believed. And, of course, the noise it makes while doing so and the electric response from the throttle, be that at 2000rpm or 7000rpm, serve only to enhance the feeling that you're travelling in a machine which even superbike riders might find perplexing. All in all we're talking about a car that, in most situations and conditions, has a depth of potential that far outweighs any opportunity to exploit it.

And, if anything, the raw numbers don't actually do the performance justice. By the time 60mph arrives the juggling act between throttle, clutch, tyres and Tarmac has only just been resolved, hence the time of 3.9sec, a couple of tenths shy of TVR's official 3.7sec claim. It's only once you select second within the snappy five-speed gearbox that the real damage is done against the stopwatch: 0-100mph takes a mere 8.5sec, 0-150mph just 20.0sec. To accelerate from the urban limit to the UK's motorway maximum takes 3.0sec. By any standards that's a mighty set of statistics.

Fortunately, the Sagaris is supported by an equally mighty set of brakes. As ever there is no anti-lock or brakeforce distribution, nor even a traction control system. But what the Sagaris lacks in electronic sophistication it almost compensates for with pedal feel and – partly because of its low weight – an ability to shed speed that not even a Porsche 911 driver would recognise on a dry surface.

## HANDLING & RIDE



**At last a TVR that goes – and handles – as good as it looks**

It takes about 10 yards to realise how much better the Sagaris is dynamically compared with any previous TVR. It's stiff, yes, but not in an uncomfortable or unrefined way. The Sagaris has shades of the Lotus Elise about the way in which it appears to seemingly glide over rough surfaces without upsetting its occupants. It is significantly more comfortable to travel in over a scarred town road than, for example, a BMW 5-series fitted with sports suspension.

Yet what really distinguishes the Sagaris dynamically is its control at high speeds. And its precision. And, most important of all, its ability to change direction oblivious to the normal forces of nature without feeling in any way neurotic, as TVRs have tended to in the past. Because of its new-found suspension composure and its low weight, the Sagaris is a car you'll naturally want to attack corners in with confidence. It's also one with a quite astonishing level of mechanical grip, both in the dry and – unusually for a TVR – in the wet as well.

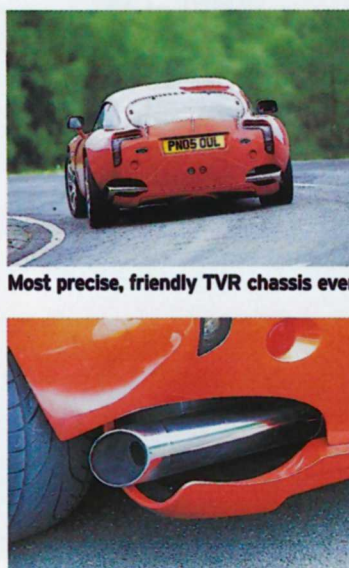
Just to round things off it steers far better than any of its predecessors, with as much feel as there is accuracy



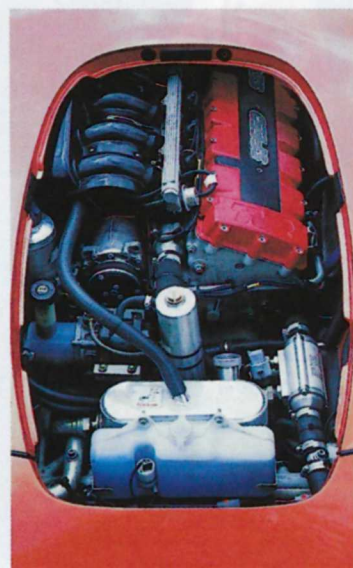
Typically extravagant interior styling, but this time it feels very well built and is easy to use; good ergonomics, too



No anti-lock but brilliant brake feel



Monstrous exhausts, monstrous sound



Engine mounted far back in chassis

Most precise, friendly TVR chassis ever



Sagaris doesn't really get into its stride until second gear, but still demolishes 60mph in 3.9sec; 100mph takes just 8.5sec



and almost none of the kickback that used to afflict old TVRs. Put simply, it's a car whose nose you can nail to whichever apex you wish, secure in the knowledge that the rest of the car will follow suit. It is not a car that feels like it might bite.

There's even a hint of high-speed understeer engineered into the chassis just for good measure, although it's still a car that can be steered on the throttle courtesy of its Hydratrac limited-slip differential. On the road, only the unusually brave, very foolish or naturally over-ambitious should attempt such antics in our opinion.

Our only genuine gripes concern the steering lock, which is dreadful, and the ease with which it's possible to grind the nose into the floor, something we did on several occasions during the test. This is not because the front suspension lacks control or is too soft – it's merely the result of the body-work being so low to the ground you can't help but introduce it to *terra firma* every once in a while. At speed this can be somewhat alarming and, over time, could prove expensive in terms of replacement paint.

## COMFORT, SAFETY AND EQUIPMENT



**Best-made TVR yet, well packaged, too. No std air-con**

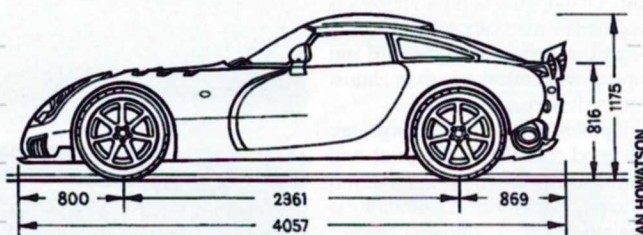
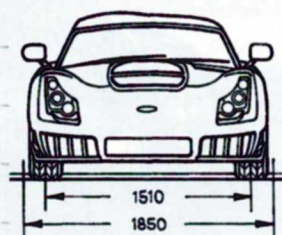
This is the section where TVRs have tended to stumble in previous road tests. Not this time. While there is still something of the home-made feel to the cabin, particularly the way it smells (namely, of glue), the Sagaris is so obviously better made than before that it easily justifies its higher price. No, the cabin is not made to the same exacting standards as a Porsche's or even a contemporary Aston Martin's, but if it were then this much performance would mean a price at least double the one you have to pay here. Overall, it's more than good enough.

In terms of packaging it's a minor miracle. Somehow it manages to appear small on the outside yet inside has bundles of room not merely for passengers, but for their luggage, too. Once you've acclimatised to the seats – specifically their dramatic shape and how hard they are – you soon realise how good the basic driving position is, how well located the pedals are, how easy to use the digital dashboard actually is and, yes, how special it feels inside. What was once a weakness, in other words, has been turned into an asset.

The only fault we experienced with the car in 1000 miles of testing concerned the windscreen washers, which deposited water on the headlights but not the screen, so clearly the quality control drive has worked.

It's hard to be 100 per cent positive about the safety of a car like the Sagaris when it doesn't have traction control, anti-lock brakes or any other

## DIMENSIONS



IAN HOWATSON

**Min/max front legroom** 1000/1290mm **Max front headroom** 890mm **Front interior width** 1450mm  
**Boot volume** 495 litres **Min/max boot width** 990/1090mm **Boot length** 830mm **Boot height** 470mm  
**Load height** 860mm **Front/rear tracks** 1510/1620mm **Kerbweight (claimed/tested)** 1078/1159kg  
**Weight distribution (front/rear)** 53:47 **Width (inc/excl mirrors)** 1850/1770mm

## SPECIFICATIONS

### Engine

**Layout** 6 cyls in line, 3996cc  
**Power** 406bhp at 7000-7500rpm  
**Torque** 349lb ft at 5000rpm  
**Max engine speed** 7800rpm  
**Specific output** 102bhp per litre  
**Power to weight** 377bhp per tonne\*  
**Torque to weight** 324lb ft per tonne\*  
**Installation** Longitudinal, front, rear-wheel drive  
**Construction** Alloy head and block  
**Bore/stroke** 96.0/92.0mm  
**Valve gear** 4 per cyl  
**Compression ratio** 12.2:1  
**Management** MBE Systems  
**Fuel** Petrol

### Gearbox

**Type** 5-speed manual  
**Ratios/mph per 1000rpm**  
**1st** 2.43/8.2 **2nd** 1.56/12.8  
**3rd** 1.24/16.1 **4th** 1.00/20.0  
**5th** 0.80/25.0  
**Final drive** 3.73  
**Steering**  
**Type** Rack and pinion, electro-hydraulic power assistance  
**Turns lock to lock** 2.0  
**Turning circle** na  
**Suspension**  
**Front** Double wishbones, coils, anti-roll bar  
**Rear** Double wishbones, coils, anti-roll bar

**Body** Two-door coupé, GRP unibody construction

### Wheels & tyres

**Wheels** 8.5J x 18in **Made of** Alloy  
**Front/rear Tyres** 255/35 R18, Dunlop SP Sport Race  
**Spare** None

### Brakes

**Front** 322mm ventilated discs  
**Rear** 298mm ventilated discs  
**Anti-lock** Not available

### Safety

Integral FIA roll cage, side impact bars

## ROAD TEST RESULTS

### Maximum speeds

**5th** 185mph/7400rpm  
**4th** 156mph/7800rpm  
**3rd** 126mph/7800rpm  
**2nd** 100mph/7800rpm  
**1st** 64mph/7800rpm

### Acceleration from rest (dry)

True mph	sec	speedo mph
30	1.9	31
40	2.5	42
50	3.1	52
60	3.9	63
70	4.9	73
80	5.9	84
90	6.9	95
100	8.5	106
110	10.1	116
120	12.3	127
130	14.4	137
140	17.2	148
150	20.0	159
<b>Standing qtr mile</b> 12.7sec/122mph		
<b>Standing km</b> 21.8sec/150mph		
<b>30-70mph</b> 3.0sec		

### Acceleration in gear (dry)

mph	5th	4th	3rd	2nd
20-40	8.4	4.3	3.2	2.4
30-50	5.6	4.0	3.0	2.3
40-60	5.5	3.9	3.0	2.2
50-70	5.5	3.9	2.9	2.0
60-80	5.6	4.0	2.7	2.0
70-90	5.9	3.9	2.7	2.0
80-100	6.1	3.9	3.0	-
90-110	6.2	4.0	3.3	-
100-120	6.7	-	-	-
110-130	-	-	-	-
120-140	-	-	-	-
130-150	-	-	-	-

### Fuel consumption

**Average/track/touring**  
 15.1/8.2/23.5mpg  
**Urban/combined** 10.5/16.7  
**Tank capacity** 57 litres  
**Real-world range** 189 miles

### Brakes (dry)

**30/50/70mph**  
 9.5/26.2/48.0 metres  
**60-0mph** 2.9sec  
**Pedal feel** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Fade** poor/fair/good/excellent

### Handling and ride (dry)

#### Normal driving

**Balance** understeer/oversteer/neutral  
**Steering feel** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Body control** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Ride quality** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Grip** poor/fair/good/excellent

#### Hard driving

**Balance** understeer/oversteer/neutral  
**Steering feel** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Body control** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Ride quality** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Grip** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Test notes** Best high-speed body control of any TVR ever is more than a decent trade-off for ride that is stiff but not shatteringly so.

#### Noise (dry)

**Idle/max revs in 3rd** 64/92dbA  
**30/50/70mph** 73/80/82dbA  
**Sound quality** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Headlights**  
**Dipped beam** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Full beam** poor/fair/good/excellent  
**Test notes** Standard headlights could have done with more power and range. Full-beam xenon lights optional.

## AUTOCAR ROAD TESTS

...are the most exhaustive published in the UK. Each car is measured, then performance tested on a neutral proving ground using Racelogic VBOX equipment and weighed using scales provided by Intercomp Europe. We also cover at least 500 miles on all types of road, and measure economy in all conditions.

\* Power- and torque-to-weight figures calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerbweight. The performance figures were taken with the odometer reading 6658 miles. AUTOCAR test results are protected by world copyright and may not be reproduced without the editor's written permission



♦ electronic trickery to keep it on the road and out of the undergrowth. On the other hand, it has fabulous brakes, is one of the few road cars sold with a full FIA-approved roll cage as standard and has more mechanical grip than almost any other rival we can think of.

Equipment levels, by and large, are pretty good considering the price and performance, although the fact that you have to pay extra for air conditioning is pretty poor. Other optional extras, would you believe, include a digital radio, six-disc CD changer, electric lumbar supports and even a DVD-based navigation system. Mr Smolenski clearly wants to keep his customers abreast of the latest gadgets, and charge them extra for the privilege, of course.

## RUNNING COSTS



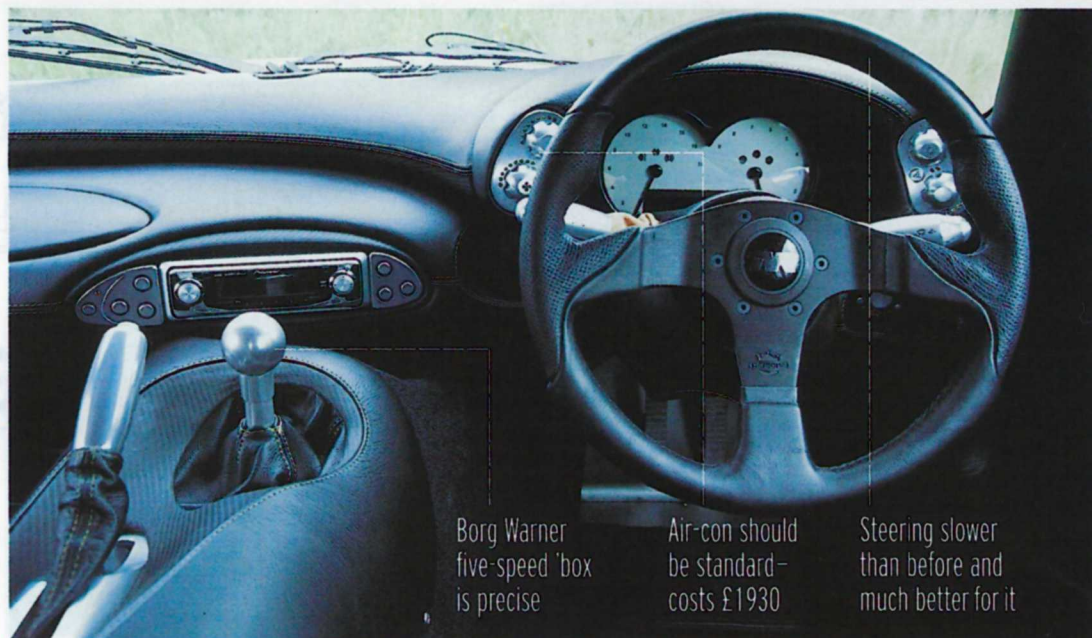
One of the cheapest ways to do 185mph there is

The big question is how much will a Sagaris be worth in four years' time with 25,000 miles under its wheels? If it manages to hold half its value over that time it will probably be considered a success. It also depends whether TVR's potential audience really believes that the quality issues are being/have been sorted. If the test car is typical then the answer would seem to be yes, in which case TVR might well have turned the corner.

Even so, running a Sagaris is not cheap, despite the fuel consumption not being anything like as bad as you'd expect - between 15 and 24mpg depending on how hard the car is used. Emissions are high so it's a full 35 per cent company car tax machine, and servicing comes regularly (every 6000 miles) and costs plenty each time. On the other hand, it's hard to imagine another 185mph car that costs less to buy, run and insure than this.

## WHAT IT COSTS

<b>On-the-road price</b>	£49,995
<b>Total as tested</b>	£54,075
<b>CO<sub>2</sub></b>	406g/km
<b>Tax at 22/40% pcm</b>	na
<b>Cost per mile</b>	na
<b>Contract hire/month</b>	na
<b>Equipment</b>	
<b>bold</b> = options fitted to test car	
Air conditioning	<b>£1930</b>
Close-ratio gearbox	<b>£1530</b>
Metallic paint	<b>£365</b>
Six-disc CD changer	<b>£255</b>
Integral FIA roll cage	●
Xenon headlights	£585
DVD-based navigation system	£2000
Limited-slip differential	●
Full leather trim	●
Digital radio	£480
● standard - not available	
<b>Insurance group</b>	19
<b>Typical quote</b>	£721
<b>Warranties</b>	
Three years, 36,000 miles	
<b>Servicing</b>	Variable, according to indicator



Borg Warner five-speed 'box is precise

Air-con should be standard - costs £1930

Steering slower than before and much better for it

Driving position is spot-on, even down to adjustable pedals; get past the smell of glue and the cabin feels very special



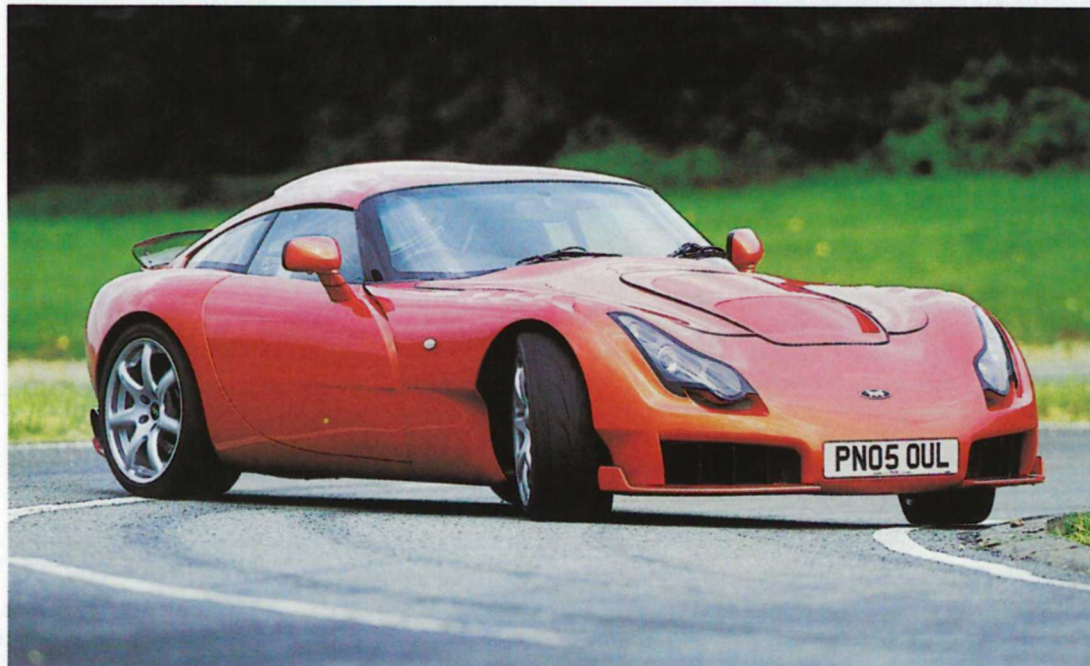
Long, wide boot surprisingly usable



Gorgeous metal rotary dials for lights



Massive road presence standard; see why the front spoiler is easy to ground?



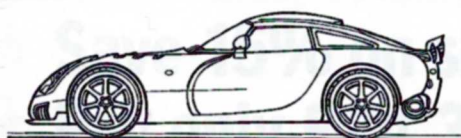
406bhp, 349lb ft and a LSD makes power oversteer very easy to start; more benign handling makes it easier to control



## THE CLASS

### TVR Sagaris £49,995

★★★★★

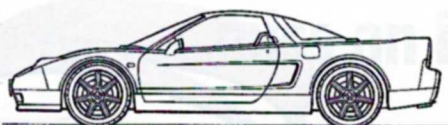


Capacity 3996cc  
Output 406bhp/349lb ft  
Max speed 185mph  
0-60mph 3.9sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> 406g/km  
Date tested 24.5.05

Easily TVR's most accomplished car to date. Very few flaws and lots of gob-smacking visual and dynamic strengths make the Sagaris one of the most exciting (and best) sports cars £50k can buy.

### Honda NSX £60,105

★★★★★

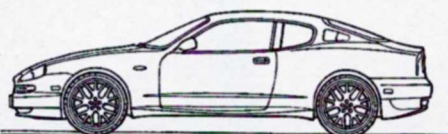


Capacity 3179cc  
Output 276bhp/224lb ft  
Max speed 172mph  
0-62mph 4.8sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> 291g/km  
Date tested 3.4.02

The NSX is the original Japanese supercar that refuses to go away. One short drive in the latest model will tell you why: it is still very much a cutting-edge machine. Beaten soundly by the TVR and Noble for raw pace.

### Maserati 4200 Coupé £56,650

★★★★★



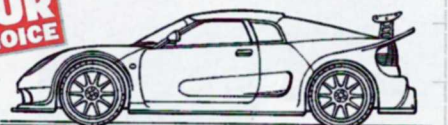
Capacity 4244cc  
Output 385bhp/333lb ft  
Max speed 177mph  
0-60mph 4.9sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> 430g/km  
Date tested 21.8.02

Probably the most desirable brand of car here and a pretty good sports coupé now it has that great naturally aspirated V8 engine. Surprisingly roomy in the back but, again, destroyed for pace by the Noble and TVR.

### Noble M400 £55,995

★★★★★

**OUR  
CHOICE**

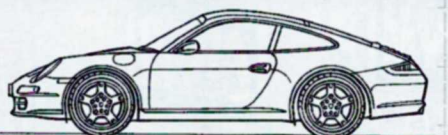


Capacity 2968cc  
Output 425bhp/390lb ft  
Max speed 173mph  
0-60mph 3.5sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> na  
Road test 4.5.04

Probably one of, if not the, fastest cars ever made for real-world point-to-point pace. Dramatic styling helps it turn heads as fast as it can get from over here to over there. Beats the TVR by the narrowest of margins.

### Porsche 911 Carrera S £65,000

★★★★★

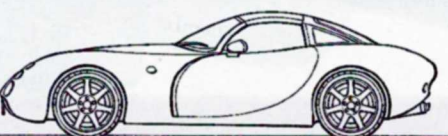


Capacity 3824cc  
Output 350bhp/295lb ft  
Max speed 182mph  
0-62mph 4.6sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> 277g/km  
Date tested 5.10.04

The S version of the new 911 is faster and sounds better, but doesn't steer, ride or even handle as sweetly as the basic Carrera. Tip: do not go TVR Sagaris or Noble M400 baiting if you own a Carrera S – you'll lose.

### TVR Tuscan S £49,995

★★★★★



Capacity 3966cc  
Output 390bhp/330lb ft  
Max speed 190mph  
0-60mph 3.9sec  
CO<sub>2</sub> 405g/km  
Date tested 15.8.01

Not as well-rounded as the Sagaris and not as dramatic to look at, either. Still, the S is for the TVR fan who likes wind in their hair and adrenaline pumping through their veins.

## THE AUTOCAR VERDICT



IT'S PROBABLY very unfair to call the Sagaris the TVR Peter Wheeler never quite delivered. Yet the timing is undeniable. New owner Nikolai Smolenski took over TVR roughly one year ago: since then his company has produced a revised Tuscan and now the Sagaris; the former is a much better car than its predecessor, the latter is the most accomplished and best TVR in history.

What distinguishes the Sagaris as something special isn't merely its pace or its extraordinary good looks – there have been plenty of TVRs that have looked good and gone like stink over the years. Instead, it is its completeness as a package, and that's a real first for TVR.

In the end the recipe is not so very different from the one Peter Wheeler pioneered so successfully for so long at TVR, because the Sagaris goes like a rocket, is affordable compared with its rivals and looks sensational – the exact same straightforward formula that brought TVR fame in the first place. The difference this time is that the Sagaris has real polish in almost everything it does. It's not a car you need to make excuses for, it is a car that takes TVR to the next level.

## TESTERS' NOTES

Love the sound of the exhaust, but there's a naughty boom period smack on 70mph that makes (legal) motorway work a pain. It disappears at 80mph.  
**Steve Sutcliffe**



The Sagaris is a surprisingly comfortable motorway car. The seats are very supportive and the transmission tunnel is the perfect height to rest an elbow.  
**Chas Hallett**



The small print © Autocar 2005. For further information on the TVR Sagaris contact TVR Engineering Ltd, Bristol Avenue, Blackpool, Lancashire FY2 0JF, (01253 509000), www.tvr.co.uk. The cost-per-mile figure is calculated over three years/36,000 miles and includes depreciation, maintenance, road tax, funding and fuel, but not insurance. Figure supplied by Lloyds TSB Autolease (0870 600 6333). The insurance quote is for a 35-year-old professional male with a clean licence and full no-claims bonus, living in Swindon, supplied by What Car? Insurance. Contract hire figure is based on a lease for three years/36,000 miles, includes maintenance and is supplied by Lombard (0870 902 3311).

The best TVR in history